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Keeping the Balance...Staying Healthy as Helpers

The ground is covered with snow and ice and more snow and more ice, which has become the pattern this winter. In some ways the out-of-the-ordinary winter matches my out-of-the-ordinary stresses. One of my sons is in the final stages of selecting a college to attend next fall; the other is recovering from knee surgery. My husband is struggling with a rapidly changing work environment. My mother needs to have both hips replaced.

In my eight years of work as a mental health counselor, I have rarely had a month like this one. Three clients have needed hospitalization, each with very serious reactions to violence and abuse in their past. I have become aware in a profound way of the personal, emotional and spiritual cost of my work. Hearing stories of violence forces me to listen to and enter into the worlds of others—worlds of hurt, depravation, even the depravity of evil. How ironic that I'm spending these snowy days compiling this issue of Report on women in the helping professions.

It's not always the extraordinary circumstances that lead to burnout, but the accumulation of stress. I believe that the everyday stresses that women face—of balancing their own needs with the needs of family, work, church, community, friends—create the kindling for burnout. Then the balance is lost, the match is struck and burnout sets in.

In the articles that follow, you will hear women's stories about their experiences with trying to achieve balance. A variety of perspectives and professions are included, yet certain themes are common—the necessity of a support group, the need for other interests, the need for a sense of calling and spirituality, and the difficulty of women working the double or triple shifts of work, family and community.

We in North America share struggles to cope with stress and burnout with women from other countries. The side bars in this issue are statements gathered while I was on an MCC study tour to Central America in May 1993. They are included to give our sisters in those countries a voice.



I found a sense of community and hope in reading each woman's story and feel more motivated than ever to be a good caretaker of myself as well as others. I hope that readers will also.

Anne Findlay-Chamberlain, a mental health counselor with Pennsylvania Counseling Services, compiled this issue during the recent winter months. Anne is a member of the MCC U.S. Committee on Women's Concerns. She attends the Harrisburg (Pa.) Brethren in Christ Church with her husband Rod, and sons Seth and Dan. She enjoys being physically active, spending time with friends and reading. She and Rod are hoping to make a healthy adjustment to having an "empty nest" within the next year.

by Elizabeth Schmidt

Parable of the Self-Sacrificial Mother

A mother came to him, saying,
Teacher, what good deed must I do
to inherit the kingdom?
I have kept the commandments,
I have sold all my belongings
and given to the poor,
I have served God and family
with all my being—
what do I still lack?
And he said to her,
Woman, love thyself.

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by Sharon Brunner

Preventing Burnout

As the director of Lifeline Ministries Women's Shelter in San Francisco, I am committed to the prevention of burnout, much as I am committed to the prevention of chronic homelessness for newly homeless women.

There is no question about the seriousness of the call in my life to be a shelter director. I receive this call with joy and I want to be able to do this work for a long time. I am aware that the average length of stay in this kind of position is about two years. June first was my fifth anniversary as the founding director of the existing program at Lifeline. Today I feel excitement and anticipation for the future, as I did when I started five years ago.

Too often I witness really fine, devoted people leaving professions because of physical, emotional and spiritual exhaustion. I believe it is important to prevent burnout in all of these categories because of how integrated and interdependent they are.

I find for myself that spiritual strength is what undergirds all that I am able to accomplish in my work. Consequently, it is essential that I stay spiritually fit. The spiritual exercises that are most empowering to me include:

1. Daily, deep meditative times of prayer in which I am reminded of the Holy Presence of God in my life. Out of that awareness I am renewed in my vision of how I am to be and what I am to do. I try to attend weekend spiritual retreats several times a year and do a silent retreat of three to five days annually if possible.
2. Besides participating in church services and the continuing study of the life of Christ, it's important to me to associate with spiritual people. I find that friends have a great deal of influence for most of us and I am no exception. I have a core group of people I look to for spiritual council and support.

The most challenging category for me is the maintenance of my physical well-being. I think becoming worn down in one's work is common to most people, and I believe people in caregiving positions are most vulnerable. I am additionally challenged because of a 20-year history of systemic lupus. It is imperative that I get my required rest and a very healthy diet. Additionally, the right balance of exercise is critical. Too much



physical activity is as harmful to me as too little. I find walking to be my most effective form of exercise. I enjoy using walking with a friend as a two-fold blessing—exercise and the opportunity to visit. I used to visit with different friends over lunch; now I invite them for walks instead.

Five years ago, when Lifeline program was being formed, I was able to work as much as was needed to establish and stabilize the program. It took several years of 60-hour weeks to accomplish the task. During that time I was very mindful of good quality time away from work. For the past three years, I have been careful to keep my hours at no more than 40 a week. I am able to maintain that limit by having built a staff and volunteer force that is very capable of handling the work while I'm away from the premises. I believe it is of utmost importance for all workers to know and honor their physical limits. It is of equal importance to let go of the need to "do it myself" and delegate to others. I am helped to do that through my own time management. It is important to be realistic, prioritize and identify what only I can and should do. It is equally important for me not to fall prey to doing too little. It is important to remain an active participant in my own growth as well as in the growth of others.

There are wonderful things to know about preventing emotional burnout. It has been most helpful for me to do deep soul-searching about why I do the type of work I do. Refining and purifying my intentions has been and continues to be the most helpful aspects of maintaining my motivation. I am awed by the wonderful blend of humanity and diversity that God has created. The Divine calls out to me to do this work as a way to honor God's mandate to care for those who are vulnerable and in need. I am aware that I walk in response to the wonderful gift of deep compassion that the Holy Spirit has given me.

Often I have to check in with myself to see if I'm relating to those in our program out of the intent to genuinely assist them in learning how to become independent. I want to love them unconditionally and believe in their ability to make their own decisions and then allow them to live with the natural consequences. What I check myself against is my human side that has a natural propensity to want to control not only the outcome of my own life, but sometimes the lives of others. I

know, of course, that setting expectations of change for others, loving conditionally, may set me up for failure and ultimate frustration.

So I work with myself and with my staff to understand the importance of living each day, doing what each of us is called to do in the manner in which we are called to do it. This means letting go of the need to control others. Instead we must trust, look for and encourage the goodness and abilities of those with whom we work. That doesn't mean an "anything goes" attitude, but rather setting acceptable boundaries and not taking personal responsibility for how others choose to be.

Finally, it is important for me to remember that "this too shall pass." Either good or bad, this will pass. It helps me not to cling with expectation or need for the present goodness to continue, and allows for reality to take its proper place. This also encourages me to not become defeated in hard times.

Sheron Brunner is the founding director of Lifeline Women's Shelter, the first transitional shelter for women and children in San Francisco. She is the mother of three grown children as well as a grandmother. She is a writer and speaker and a member of the Upland (Calif.) Brethren in Christ Church.



by Mary L. Wenger Weaver

What is Success?

Years ago I attended a reception at a Mennonite church with my spouse. I walked through the food line and sat down in a small circle of chairs to visit with others as I ate. I joined a college teacher from years previous, delighted to have the opportunity to chat with her. She turned to me and said, "I have read about your husband and his work; I read articles by him in Mennonite periodicals. He seems to be contributing to our church. I have not heard anything about you. I'm sorry."

At that moment another person in the circle questioned my neighbor on another topic, and the conversation turned to that topic. My former teacher's comment went unanswered, but it stayed with me. What is success? Am I successful? Is a career with church-wide visibility more valuable than a non-publicized career? Are recognition and expressions of appreciation from others vital to my sense of self-worth?

I work in a helping profession. I am a nurse. With the exception of short intervals, I have worked as a nurse since I graduated from college in the 1960s. My work is interactive. My relationships to my residents and their families are private and confidential. I work hard and work consistently. I am dependable and have contributed significantly to many lives in these past 30 years. I will never make the headlines. I never had the chance to share with my former college teacher how I am contributing to our church and to my community. How can we as women feel good about ourselves and our professional lives despite a society, and even church, which tends to measure success with public visibility? Are there creative ways to nurture our inner selves, fostering our feelings of self-worth and energizing us for continual productive work?

First and foremost, we need to enjoy our job and feel that it is of significance in this world. We need to genuinely like what we do. We need job satisfaction. I have a good friend who is a

"The problem is that as a woman I have to juggle many roles—in house, children and on the job."

—Juilda, director of CHISPA(MEDA), Masaya, Nicaragua

junior high school teacher. Her students are at a developmental stage where their attitudes and behaviors are frequently difficult and challenging; that can cause burnout. My friend shared that she is re-motivated by experiences that are meaningful. If she "connects" with a child, she feels her life impacts on others, and that gives her job satisfaction.

She shared the example of a student who approached her after class and told her she was going to spend the weekend with her father who lives in another household and whom she had not seen in months. The young student acknowledged feeling anxious but excited. Friday afternoon my teacher friend stopped the student and wished her well on her weekend visit. The student responded warmly and felt cared about by one of her teachers. Such an interaction complements the more traditional task of teaching—the presentation of material. Others find job satisfaction from feeling a part of a team at the work place. When our individual work tasks and goals mesh with those of administration and institution, we feel affirmed and valuable. We feel motivated to work hard and we truly enjoy the process.

We need to keep a perspective on our careers as they relate to the larger picture of our lives. Women fill many roles; often women are simultaneously professionals, wives, mothers, active church members, active community workers, athletes and daughters of aging parents. Our careers are only one part of our total identity. Throughout a 24-hour period, we weave in and out of several roles. This multi-focused woman can feel frustrated by the high demands on her time or can actually feel buffeted by the changing settings. For example, if things did not go well at work today, it makes no difference to my 2-year-old, who squeals with delight when I pick her up at day care. She hugs me tightly and chatters happily as we drive home. I mentally take a step back from my work world and realize that tomorrow I will again tackle the work problems. Now, I will enjoy mothering and nurturing. My job and related role is only one part of me.

We need to develop interests outside of our work place that bring personal enjoyment. This includes the more traditional hobbies, such as reading or hand work, but aren't limited to these. You can garden with a flair, plan weekend trips and invite friends to join you, join a class at the Y and learn a new skill, or plan your annual vacation unconnected to extended family and professional responsibilities and make memories for yourself and those in your family unit.

If a woman works five days a week, she needs help at home. Consider a weekly cleaning person, so that you are free to find time for pleasure, family and social relationships. That is not a luxury; it is good household management. Treat yourself. A

nurse friend of mine works the 3-11 shift in a nearby city. She has two small children and a husband in her family unit. Two evenings a week at the end of her shift, she treats herself to time at the club, exercising, sitting in the hot tub, relaxing, enjoying a "feel-good" hour to herself. She finds this absolutely essential to her mental health and positive life outlook.

We need to validate ourselves with others. Find a group of persons whom you can trust and speak with openly. Talk about life's happenings—the fun and pleasurable and the painful and difficult. Validate major life choices. Brainstorm for problem solving both at home and at work. I belong to such a group. Approximately eight years ago, four women from my Sunday school class decided we needed to talk more. We were very good friends but seldom made time to catch up on each other's life happenings, although we cared very much about each other. We all worked outside our homes and had children and spouses. Free time was at a minimum.

We decided to meet monthly at a local restaurant for breakfast on a Saturday and treat ourselves to friendship and caring—no formal agenda, no officers, no necessity for cooking and house-cleaning; just ourselves. Talking with others prevents burnout at home and at work. Our group has a wonderful sense of humor. We laugh a lot—at ourselves, our life situations, happenings at work. More than once, community friends approach our table in the restaurant and ask if we could keep it down! We also share difficult times—serious diagnoses and medical problems, death of those close to us, children with problems, marital difficulties, rifts in relationships, work problems. Confidence is assumed and honored. Trust established with others and the openness that results, create a solid foundation on which we can dance life's song.

I look to the women of our church for wisdom in finding job satisfaction in my career and in finding peace and happiness in my relationships at home, in church and in community. I observe and talk with my mother and the elderly women, my peers who are middle-aged women, my daughters and the young adult women. Questions and answers are found in all groups. New questions surface. We work for common goals and help each other along life's way as we dialogue.

Mary Wenger Weaver has worked as a registered nurse for 27 years, the past 18 years in the field of geriatrics. She is currently a unit manager of a 68-bed Alzheimer's Unit, Winebrenner Village, Findlay, Ohio. She is an active member of First Mennonite Church in Bluffton, Ohio, and is the mother of three adult daughters who challenge her thinking in professional and ethical issues.

"See systemic problems as global, have a baby and be part of a women's group."

—Donna Vukelich, a North American woman living in Nicaragua for over 10 years, answering how she keeps hope in that sometimes hopeless situation.


by Regina Shands Stoltzfus

Learning to Dance

On my living room wall hangs a framed poster that shows two African women, hands clasped in each other's and broad smiles on their faces as they whirl about, dancing together. A third woman looks on, head lifted, mouth open in song as she claps her hands to the music she is creating. The poster's words read:

"If you can walk
you can dance
If you can talk
you can sing."

One recent evening my two-year-old daughter and I sat beneath this poster, sharing a cuddle. She looked up at it, smiled and pointed. "Mommy dancing!" she declared.

I love the thought that the sight of joyous dancing women makes Rachel see her mom. And I love the poster. The Zimbabwean saying reminds me to seek songs, seek dance. I'm capable of more than I think. The women on the poster remind me of women along the way in my life who have helped me to discover my dance and my song—the ones who have offered me support.

It's easy to think of that word—support—only in terms of the people who get you through the rough times, and I have been blessed with those folks. But support goes beyond crisis management; we have to find our way through the good and just-okay times too. I'm starting to appreciate these people more and more. Sometimes they're the crisis management people, too. They help me move from place to place.

I first met Debbie several years ago when she joined the staff of the women's organization I was working for. We worked together on a project that assisted women on welfare who were in job training programs. I was also beginning to work on issues of cultural diversity and racism in my work and with the church. I was struggling with how to do this, and still be nice, still have people like me. Debbie, an African-American like myself, showed me what it meant to be driven by one's convictions and how to speak the truth in love. She challenged people on racism, no matter who or where they might be or whether they would like her.

We attended our organization's annual meeting in Chicago a couple of years ago. At the urging of the few women of color

employed there, we were beginning to examine racism within the organization (yes, there is racism in women's groups). After a grueling session in which many women, including the executive director, ended up in tears, Debbie and I slipped away to a Mexican restaurant to chill out. We agreed we would not talk about race, about the organization or about anything that had happened earlier in the day. We were there to rest, relax and enjoy a good meal.

The pleasant low lighting and quiet music in the restaurant, not to mention the great food, got us off to a good start. We learned that the place was family owned and that most of the staff members were related. In the kitchen, we could hear them laughing and speaking to each other in Spanish.

Midway through our meal, a group of three couples, all white, was seated at the table next to us. They were out for a pleasant evening themselves, and there was lots of joking and laughter from their table. As the evening wore on, though, the laughter from the men got a little bit louder and the wives got quieter and seemed embarrassed. We soon found out why. The men, without any regard to, or perhaps for the benefit of the African American women sitting next to them and the Hispanic family serving them, were telling "nigger" and "spic" jokes and stories.

I couldn't believe it. Our meal was done; I was tired and strangely enough, embarrassed. I wanted to leave and told Debbie we should do so. We weren't going to discuss race, right? She looked at me as though I were crazy and then explained patiently that she shouldn't let this kind of blatant racism go unchallenged. While we were having our discussion, the group next to us finished eating and was preparing to go. The men got up and went to pay the checks. Debbie got up as well. In my mind I fast forwarded to the part where the men, who had been drinking, switched from verbal to physical abuse.

But she didn't follow the men. She went over to the table where their nervous wives were sitting, leaned in and murmured a few words to them. They murmured back. Then she came back and said, "Okay, let's go." As we were preparing to leave, one of the women from the next table came over and



apologized, again, for the men's behavior. They left. We left. End of scene.

I hold that moment up not for its specialness, but for the opposite reason. An ordinary person, living an ordinary life, doing what comes naturally for the beliefs that person holds, without question or apology—without regard for being liked or approved of.

Debbie has been a crisis management person for me many times. I need to be lifted up; sometimes I need to be carried. But most of the time, I just need to have my hand held and to be shown how to dance.

Regina Shands Stoltzfus is staff associate for urban peacemaking with Mennonite Conciliation Service, a program of MCC U.S. She and her husband Art are youth sponsors at Lee Heights Community Church in Cleveland, Ohio, and parents of Matthew, Danny and Rachel.

by Jan Wiebe Neufeldt

The Rhythms of Creation

A few years ago I was working at a small-town counseling agency as part of my training as a clinical social worker. I counseled a number of women there who seemed to be telling me variations on a common theme—the violation of women. Their stories sat heavily in my gut, filling me with anger and sorrow and making me feel helpless to respond adequately to their needs. I was surprised at my reaction because I thought I was well acquainted with stories of abuse. What I didn't realize then was that I had not yet allowed myself to be fully aware of my own story of being a woman in this world and so I was particularly vulnerable to their stories.

Over the months, my needs began to get in the way of my ability to be helpful. Fortunately, a supervisor challenged me to look at why I was blocked from knowing their grief. I realized I had not allowed myself to grieve and let go of previous intense encounters I had had with the horrors of violence.

I learned that if I was going to live compassionately, opening myself to be touched by more of the destructiveness in this world, I needed to learn how to integrate these experiences while processing the trauma I was experiencing secondhand. I believe that nurturing myself is the only way I can effectively work in an intense helping profession for any length of time while maintaining my health. Indeed, I think a part of my professional responsibility as a counselor is to be committed to my own health. But I've needed to learn to do it out of love for myself rather than out of a feeling of professional obligation or duty.

I, like many other women, have been socialized to nurture others—often at the expense of myself. This used to be my primary source of self-esteem. But I became so oriented to caring for others that I lost my ability to care for and respect myself. Before I could practice good self-care, I had to value myself enough to do it.

Being other-oriented and having low self-esteem can be barriers to practicing good self-care, but other factors can also contribute. One's workplace can discourage self-nurturance. When I entered my current workplace (a sexual assault center) for the initial job interview, I began to make an assessment of my own. When I felt positive enough about the health of the organization itself, I began to more actively pursue the possibility of

"It's hard to work with abused women. We work hard and they go back to the same setting."

—Marina, director of the 8th of March Women's Collective in Managua, Nicaragua. When asked if she has hope for the next generation, she replied, "I think so."

employment. Now I continue to reassess my initial impressions of the agency as an employee. I am fortunate to have a good job. But I think it is still important for me to know how the workload expectations fit with mine, how people handle conflict and stress and how much self-care is valued and promoted. By "reading" the agency, I am better equipped to respond to the work climate and assert my own needs when appropriate. I realize that it may not always be in my power to be as discerning about my choice of employment, but I think it is important to enter any place of employment from a grounded, empowered position.

However, I haven't always been encouraged to maintain my health in my job experiences. I was once a part of a work environment that reinforced the idea that the depth of my compassion or commitment was proven by self-denial. I ignored my needs for nurturance because other needs seemed to always be so much greater than my own. My compassion did not extend to myself. After I "gave it my all," I burned out. I had nothing left but a sense of guilt. I thought I must not have really cared if I could leave the job and all the people who needed me.

In retrospect, I have never regretted giving so much during that time because I feel I was able to accomplish a great deal. But my body and my spirit have taught me to set limits. I now realize that the world's needs are somewhat endless and I am not much help to anyone, including myself, if I don't seek wholeness or balance. I have learned that self-care is a part of a lifestyle of compassion.

Being a counselor is a part of who I am but there are many other parts of me. I am exploring what some of those parts are and how they give me life. I am out of balance because I have not given attention to the light-hearted, creative, playful sides of me for too long.

Balance includes taking in nurturance as well as giving it out. It means just being—listening to the stillness of my body and creation. It means doing—being a part of the activity that daily life and a commitment to a life of compassion requires. It means balancing work life with home life, and community with solitude. It means I have to let go of that which I cannot change and commit myself to that which may be a very long process of change. It requires that I say no to that which takes me off balance and that I catch myself when it happens anyway.

My self-care has become a spiritual matter. Balance can provide me with wholeness, which is a way of living out more fully who God wants me to be—me. I think burnout happens when we deny the importance of parts of ourselves that keep us whole. Nature rejuvenates itself by going through cycles or seasons of death and rebirth. I think I can learn a great deal about

my own life from the rhythms of creation. It provides me with a framework to understand what seems to be incongruent in my work—the mixture of hope and joy with pain and grief.

In counseling people who have been sexually abused or assaulted, I have grown to admire the strength and courage of people who have become survivors. They teach me about healing and they give me a great deal of hope. In these and in other ways, counseling is a very life-giving experience for me. But for me to breathe in the fullness of their experience, I still need to take in a sense of the desecration they have often experienced. The destructive energy that entered them now enters me through vicarious experience.

Two ways I protect myself when I counsel are by using a protective shield and by doing a kind of cleansing ritual. I do not know where I first heard of the idea of using a shield, but I realize that I have acquired one. It is an internal boundary that blocks out some of the destructive energy. But it is very important that it be a permeable shield; otherwise I would become dispassionate.

I also try to review my experiences with each client and try to determine how I have been affected by her. At times I need to go through a kind of cleansing ritual where I imagine the loving energy of the Spirit washing away the parts of my experience that could be toxic to me while leaving the pieces that I need to remember or feel.

I think that I am partially successful using these methods of self-care, but I have found that in my private time I am unable to witness sexual violence in the media without experiencing a deep sense of personal violation. During these hours, my shield is down, and I become more vulnerable. And then I need to grieve again. The better I am at letting myself feel the grief, the quicker I am able to go on from the experience and the less energy it takes from me.

As I am able to embrace my needs for pleasure and grief, creativity and change, as well as rest, I feel I am coming into more of what God wants me to be. To me, self-care is about valuing ourselves and living the cycles of death and rebirth, the rhythms of creation.

Jan Wiebe Neufeldt is counseling at a sexual assault center in Lethbridge, Alta. She recently moved there from Ontario where she obtained her master's of social work degree. Prior to this, she lived in Chicago for four years (three in Mennonite Voluntary Service), where she worked with inner-city children and youth. Currently she is negotiating publication of a manuscript relating some women's experiences of spiritual abuse in the Mennonite church. She married Dave (Wiebe) Neufeldt in 1989.

by Marty Hostetler

Support for a Lifetime of Nurturing

Women have traditionally been the mainstay of the helping professions. As the role of women has changed, so has society's perception of women in the double role of professional and nurturer. In the past, nurturing was a respected trait. At this point in time, it seems to connote weakness and passivity rather than being a positive aspect of a profession.

The profession of teaching can feel very much like a one-way proposition—a teacher gives and society takes. Teachers traditionally gave to the student, but society today demands as much or more than the individual student demands. The call to nurture is strong enough to compensate for the demands, with the support of others. The means of support is a personal matter.

I'd like to relate some of the support that validated me throughout my career. Mary was a special friend and mentor to me in college. I got to know her through my job while in college. We worked together in the library. Our employer was a challenging person to work for. Mary, in her wisdom, knew how to compromise and make the day enjoyable. I never heard her raise her voice or say anything hurtful, even though she was willing to point out a wrong. She was always willing to give advice but never forced it. She could get a point across when I wasn't willing to hear the advice from my mother. She was instrumental, too, in my learning the value of women's rights as well as responsibilities. She was a lovely lady I kept in touch with. I have a tree in my front yard that is the "Mary" tree, in honor of one she gave me years after I graduated.

The mentor role is one that I now find satisfying, in the sense that I'm able to see growth, to see maturation and change. I enjoy being a mentor. Maybe this is because of Mary's influence, maybe it is because I don't have children of my own and therefore have more time to give. Through the years I have enjoyed students and relatives. There were the students who dropped by my house for conversations and news when I lived behind the school where I taught. Among them were two girls who shared my enjoyment of biking. One of them is now a teacher herself.



My niece "inherited" my love of books and came to Bluffton College where I could minister to her in lieu of her mother, bearing orange sherbert when needed as medicine and providing moral support. She is now a teacher. Her friend was a student in my fourth grade class. She also became a

teacher and was a substitute in our building and in my class. She "inherited" my schedule, if not my classroom, as she was hired when I retired. Another student's birthday was close to mine and we celebrated birthdays together. She became much closer through a rough time in her life—we shared laughter, tears, shopping for baby supplies (I knew very little about that one, but we accomplished a lot). She now goes to college and works hard to help support herself and the baby. Another shares my love of music. We all share a love of banana splits and for several years have discussed life at Denny's over goodies. One of the girls is now my "mentee" through our church mentor program.

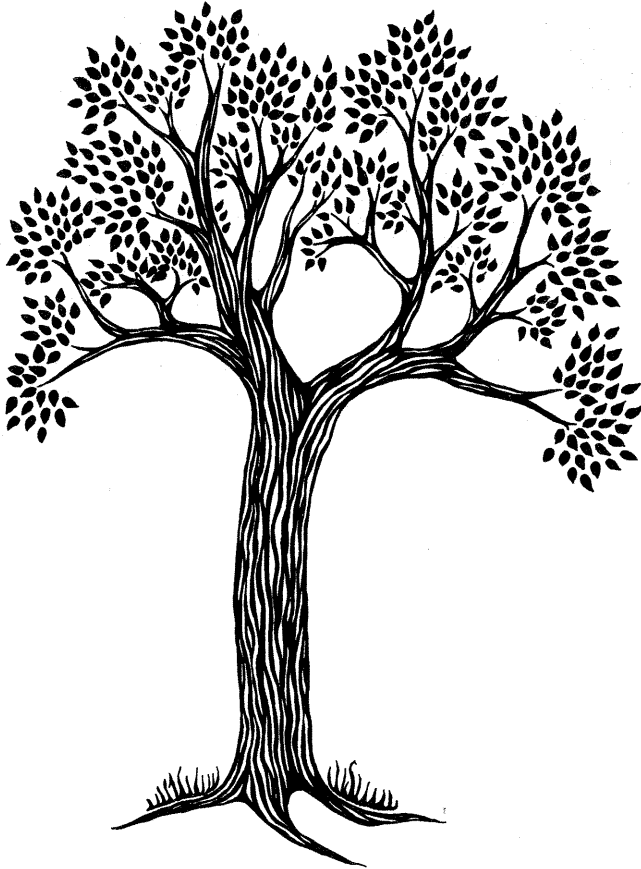
I found support from friends in enjoying stolen time to relax. My particular choice was enjoying coffee, breakfast, a movie, shopping and other casual activities with friends. Some of our faculty organize a group experience several times a year. We've gone on a shopping "overnight" where we go further from home than an afternoon would permit. The idea is to relax and let our hair down. This requires extra organization in our busy schedules, but it is fun.

There are friends who have given nurture in various degrees and through various stages and episodes in my life. The friend who comes most readily to mind is Eloise. Eloise was the all-time good listener. She had the patience of Job and the heart of a saint. She also had much common sense and a wonderful sense of humor. Eloise had the classroom next to mine for a number of years and I took advantage of that to vent frustrations. I invariably left feeling better as she would point out the humor of the situation—or get me to see the problem in perspective. She was always willing to put life aside and go for a cup of coffee. She nurtured so many of us with her gentle insight, wisdom and humor. She was a terrific music teacher who helped students enjoy the music while they learned. Eloise died two years ago of cancer—but not without a fight that showed tremendous bravery.

"Health workers have to neglect their own health while they take care of others."

—Jeocon Cajena, psychologist at Berta Calderon Women's Hospital, Managua, Nicaragua. When asked how

the staff continue working in terrible conditions, she replied, "They get hardened in order to survive, or they need to get out."



Without naming them, there have been other friends who have given of themselves through nurturing. One friend called me regularly while I was going through a period of depression. I couldn't force myself to make phone calls but benefited much from her contact. That friend didn't give up—she called regularly to chat and remind me that she was around. Another friend has lost two children through death. She serves as a wonderful example of strength. She always has time to help someone out and share with them. There is also the friend who (during my period of depression) suggested that I would enjoy getting my certificate in gifted education and worked with me while I did that. She even took over my classroom so I could lead a special class for gifted students. I have been truly blessed to have known these people.

A different source of support is my family. It's important to enjoy and interact with family members completely apart from our profession. The relaxation that comes with just being with my family is a focal point of my life. Coping with family prob-

lems and crises may force us to put our professions in perspective, too.

I've appreciated support from my church. I chose to work in the church in ways that were not associated primarily with my profession. Instead of teaching, I sing in the choir and quilt with other women in the church.

Another way of receiving satisfaction and a sense of renewal is to shift emphases within the job. This can be done for teachers by trying new materials. Since we regularly switch texts and emphases in education, we are able to be renewed. Because in classroom teaching we have a new group of students every year, each year gives the revitalizing chance to reapply ourselves. Even more renewing can be the switch to a different grade level.

Some persons feel a calling or mission for a profession. As I entered college, I did not have a sense of calling, but through my years with the faculty at Bluffton College, I felt very right about entering the teaching field. This feeling was a huge help throughout my years of teaching. I believe that the support of those who nurtured me as a student provided an excellent foundation of support. Some of those instructors were still available as support throughout my teaching years.

My goal in teaching was to teach my students the skills to be independent. Learning to be independent and becoming a productive, contributing member of society has been my call. Accomplishing my goals compensated for the lack of affirmation of society in general. Sharing your mission with those close to you reinforces God's affirmation.

A belief in God as the supreme supporter is my basic belief. We need to address nurturing/affirmation in terms of our relationship with God. That is an area that needs the help of God. I received a Christmas card with the words: "God made so many different kinds of people—why would He allow only one way to serve Him?" As we find our particular way to serve God, let us look to Him to lead us in our mission as we strive to answer the call to serve.

Marty Hostetler has deep roots in the Bluffton, Ohio, area. She's a product of the Bluffton public schools and college (except for graduate work) and has spent most of her teaching career in Bluffton schools. She and her husband Lowell have lived in Bluffton most of their married lives. She is a member of First Mennonite Church and has been an active member as a quilter, choir member, educator, trustee and thrift shop worker. She especially enjoys friends, family, her two Labs (dogs), bicycling, quilting and being outdoors. She enjoyed teaching tremendously and is confident she will find other rewarding opportunities in retirement.

"Tell the people of our struggles and how the government does not respond to the people. Tell about our reality and continue to communicate with us."

—Elvia Elverado, Honduras

by Tami Spurlin Camacho

A Nanny's Tale

Tami Spurlin Camacho is from Georgia and even after 10 years in Pennsylvania, has the hint of an accent to go along with her personal warmth, wonderful ways of expressing herself and quick wit. We spent a delightful winter afternoon talking about her work. The following are excerpts from that conversation.

Anne Findlay-Chamberlain (AFC): Your present job is as a nanny. What does that entail?

Tami Spurlin Camacho (TSC): After leaving a job as a case manager at a detox center, I was working part time for a family with three adopted children. After I was there two weeks, the full-time nanny left suddenly and they approached me to consider doing it full time. I've been doing it for three years now. My experience of childcare is different than many people's. I work in the home four ten-hour days a week, and get weekends off. Most people who provide childcare work with many children at once and there is a lot of turnover in children and caretakers.

The children I work with are five, four, three and two. Because of the professions of the people I work for, I'm paid fairly well compared to other child care workers. But compared to what my peers make in other professions, I don't compare by a long shot.

AFC: One of the complaints I hear from childcare workers is the lack of benefits. In our culture, not having benefits is very difficult.

TSC: I don't have benefits through my job, but I am now covered under my husband's benefits. That was the biggest sticking point of whether I would take the job, because I didn't marry until well over a year into the job. In fact I ended up paying a lot of money for health care in that year; I had a lot of

health problems in that year and it all adds up.

AFC: Besides setting you back financially, did the lack of benefits affect you in other ways?

TSC: It created a lot of stress and a sense of somehow feeling that my job, and not just mine but all childcare provider's jobs, are not valued. This field is really important, and it allows parents to do other things. For example, my employer could not do what she does if she did not have someone like me. She is a very gifted, brilliant surgeon. She does work that I truly respect, work with breast cancer. She has the resources to adopt three children, some with special needs. But in order to make that household run, she needs to have quality help. Many people providing child care are enabling others to do valuable jobs in the community. I support any man's or woman's choice to work outside the home, but if they have children, there's a need to find someone to care for them.

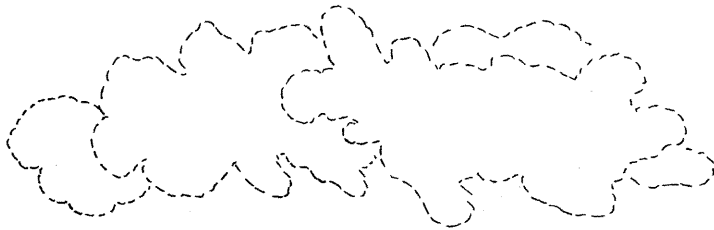
Often in our culture people don't want to pay adequately for childcare—they don't want to pay enough to hire someone with a college education or find someone with the gifts or qualities they want to take care of their child. You have to place some kind of value on it, and in our society that value is monetary, benefits and respect for the job. You need to be proud of what you do and feel that other people respect that. I think that as a society we don't value children. We pretend that we do, but I don't think that we really do. That made me feel that my job wasn't valued.

AFC: How do you continue in your job and retain a feeling of value, self-respect and self-esteem?

TSC: I really love the kids. I feel that I am able to use my gifts to help parent them. I've taken care of the two smallest children since they were born. What I bring to my job is who I am

**"God isn't in the mountains.
God is here among the people.
So we need to fight for
justice."**

**—Elvia Elverado, Vegas de los
delicios, Honduras**



more than what I do. I am a being-type person, not a doing-type person. It is something above money and I feel that it's valuable because I'm contributing to their lives. When they make a facial expression that I make or always say "please" and "thank you" or sing songs I've taught them, then I see the seeds I've sown in their lives and I know I've done something good. They are very secure children, very independent. I see the fruit of some of the gifts that I have coming out in them, and so that's the reward to me. I also see qualities developing in me that are best taught by children—patience and creativity.

I have a strong commitment to them. Three of the four are adopted. I have always been a strong advocate for adoption. They happen to be from different cultures and I enjoy that. I don't see my job not being valued as my problem. I think I am doing really important work. I see this as more of a problem outside of me.

AFC: How do you handle it when others don't value your work?

TSC: Sometimes I just feel bad. Sometimes I do take it personally. One time my husband and I met another couple and they said what they did and we said what we did, and nobody asked me anything about my job. Often people don't ask me anything about it, or don't think that I have a brain.

AFC: What do you tell others about your job?

TSC: I call myself a nanny, although a nanny usually lives in with the family. Sometimes I say I take care of children or babysit and sometimes people think I sit and eat bonbons and watch soap operas all day. I understand what stay-at-home mothers go through. You feel isolated. I have intellectual pursuits that I keep up. I feel like I have the best of both worlds. I get to go and spend time with them and I get to go home in the evening.

I do things with the children that I wouldn't otherwise do. On one beautiful day with a blue sky and those white puffy clouds that float by, we laid on the driveway for about two hours and

"Sometimes I run ahead, but then I have to step back and take my sisters with me."

—Veronica Argueda, staff worker for SERPAJ (Service for Peace and Justice), Managua, Nicaragua

watched the clouds. You just don't do that if you don't have a child to remind you. I experience how much fun finger painting is, and seeing Christmas through their eyes, and answering hard questions while driving through Harrisburg and the children asking why these houses are torn down and the ones in their neighborhood aren't. When you see life through their eyes you do things, like sledding. I've been sledding this winter and never did it before in my life.

AFC: What do you do for support or venting?

TSC: I have other friends that have small children. One friend and I get together once a week in the summer to do activities together with the kids. I talk to my friends that have kids, and to my boss, and get feedback about what I am doing. Sometimes I will talk to my Mom and get hints from her. My husband is a very nurturing person, and he gives me time at the end of the work day to unwind, take a bath or read a book. He's very helpful around the house and also affectionate. He'll rub my feet after a tiring day. The running of the house is both of our responsibilities.

AFC: How do you contrast the lifestyle you see in a physician's home with your own lifestyle?

TSC: I thought I had most of that settled until I first started working there. I was secure in my ideas of living simply. I went through a period when I really struggled because I saw how much easier just having money does make life. If you want to go somewhere, you just go. If you see something you want for your house, you just buy it. If you want to adopt children, you just do it. But I also realize that she invested a lot of herself to become a surgeon. It's all comparative. We live like royalty compared to so many people in the world.

I don't ever come home at night and wonder if I am doing the right thing. Plus I don't have to deal with the rat race and it doesn't matter what I wear to work. Paul and I don't come home with lots of worries about our jobs.

AFC: Do you feel support from the church or the Christian community?

TSC: Not especially.

AFC: Do you have any concluding thoughts?

TSC: I'd just much rather spend my energy investing in people than in anything else.

Tami and her husband Paul live with their dog Lewis in Harrisburg, Pa. They attend the Harrisburg Brethren in Christ Church.

Letters

I've been receiving your newsletter for several years but none was as timely as the issue on singleness. I read it on our return from our honeymoon when I picked up the mail from "my" place to "our" place! It was a good reminder that now that I am "safely" married I need to be extra conscious of the singles around me. I think one item was left out in the issue, and that is mindset. Most married women grew up discussing relationships and people, starting from the pre-teen years. The single, especially those who live away from the family freundschaft, are more likely to discuss things, ideas and activities. So the married women looks at the single with, "She has nothing to say; she has no one; what could I talk to her about?" The single looks at the married and says, "Doesn't she have anything else to talk about than her husband and kids?" Learning this difference helped me understand why it was so difficult to make friends where I lived previously. When I started talking about their relationships it started to open some doors. I think it's important to teach our young to be sensitive in knowing what they can discuss with people.

I know this is lengthy but I did want to share what I learned. One other thing I appreciated was the honesty of one single who said in effect that she wasn't sure she wanted to be married. I can identify with that because I dealt with that too. Most of my married friends looked at me like I was losing it when I said, "I love him but I'm not sure I want to give up my single life." Fortunately I had some friends who had married "late" in life and understood what I was going through. But do most marrieds realize that it's normal for singles to feel this way? I doubt it. Again thanks for devoting an issue to singleness.

—Shirley Wilbers, Harrisonburg, Va.

Thank you for the last issue of *Report* on singleness. As a woman who has been happily married for 10 years, I have to admit that the grass does sometimes look greener on the single side of the fence. I do miss being able to do what I want, when I want, without having to negotiate childcare, use of the car, finances and so on.

Being married can be lonely too. People seem to think that a husband can meet all of a woman's needs for companionship. But everyone needs more than one friend, and it can be hard making friends when you are half of a couple.

Perhaps worst of all is that it is very hard for a woman to have male friends, at least in a small town. Women friends are fine and couple friends are fine, but it is assumed that the wives will talk to each other, not to each other's husbands, at least most of the time. Before I was married, many of my closest friends (all platonic) were men. Now people think I'm having an affair if I spend time with them.

I think the writers hit the nail on the head when they said that both states have advantages and disadvantages. Singles do have a freedom which married people, especially parents, do not have. I am personally glad to be married, but it is certainly not the only way to be or even necessarily "the best" way.

—Michelle Bull, Port Perry, Ont.

I really appreciated the *Report* on singleness, for the balanced and holistic perspectives it presented, ranging from a long-time single/now married viewpoint, to that of long-time, never-married experience; from fullness of life to pain and emptiness; from a public stance to a private, unnamed position. Several of the articles expressed the unity of paradoxes so well! As a single woman myself, I felt honoured and affirmed by these articles. Thank you.

—Mary Mae Schwartzentruber, Ailsa Craig, Ont.

News and Verbs

- The theme of **"Women and Men in Partnership: A Journey Toward Mutuality"** was explored for four Tuesdays in January and February during an extension course offered at Columbia Bible College in Clearbrook, B.C. Planned jointly by MCC B.C. Women's Concerns and the college, the course focused on biblical perspectives on relationships and included lectures, storytelling and discussion.
- "Daughters of Olapa," a new work by Mennonite composer Carol Ann Weaver, was among pieces performed in April at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ont., at Music Gallery in Toronto, and at Concordia University in Montreal. It was presented by Blue Rider Ensemble, a Canadian chamber music group that performs new music. "Daughters of Olapa" is a series of musical vignettes based on Kenyan stories about women.
- A meeting for conference and church-based historians will focus on the **experience of Mennonite women**. It will be Oct. 20-22 at The Meetinghouse in Harleysville, Pa. Speakers will include Donella Clemens, moderator of the Mennonite Church; Kimberly Schmidt of the State University of New York in Binghamton, and representatives of historical societies: Marlene Epp, Ontario; Hope Kauffman Lind, Oregon; Mary Jane Hershey and Carolyn C. Wenger, Pennsylvania. Contact Carolyn Nolan, 215-256-3020.
- "The Quiet in the Land?" is the title of the **first academic conference on Anabaptist women's history**, to be June 8-11, 1995, at Millersville (Pa.) University. Contact Diane Zimmerman Umble, Millersville, at 717-872-3233, fax 717-871-2003; or Marlene Epp, Ontario, 519-650-0819.
- **Mennonite Lawyers Association** will hold a conference at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center in Pennsylvania, October 28-30. The conference will offer training sessions on integrating mediation into law practice, with continuing legal education credit. There will be presentations on "When the Church Judges," addressing fairness questions raised when the church disciplines members for misconduct. For more information or to be on the mailing list for the Mennonite Lawyers Association, contact Don Yoder, Laurelville, 800-839-1021.

"Women in this country are not just a little lower than men, but are on the floor."

—Rita, head of National Women's Council of Honduran Mennonite Churches

- Jan Lugibihl of Chicago, Ill., has been named national coordinator for the **National Assembly of Religious Women (NARW)**, a multi-issue organization representing the concern for justice of grassroots women of faith. For information contact NARW at 529 S. Wabash, Chicago, IL 60605; 312-663-1980.
- A new **Bible study** encourages Mennonite women to "Keep the Faith." This 80-page devotional study of the Letter of Hebrews was written for women's groups by Brenda Martin Hurst. It was produced by WMSC and Women in Mission. Copies were sent to all Mennonite and General Conference Mennonite Church congregations in June.
- A **retreat for women who are survivors** of childhood sexual abuse will be held at Kenbrook Bible Camp in Lebanon, Pa., November 18-20, 1994. Priority will be given to Brethren in Christ and Mennonite women; registration is limited to 40 applicants. MCC U.S. Women's Concerns is sponsoring the retreat. Women's Concerns is interested in helping to sponsor survivor retreats in other regions (for women or men or both). Contact Women's Concerns for information.
- Mary Oyer, professor of church music at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Ind., was **commencement speaker** at Eastern Mennonite College, May 1.
- In February, Mary H. Schertz received **tenure at AMBS**. She was named associate professor of New Testament.
- Lois Thieszen Preheim of Henderson, Neb., has been appointed to the **AMBS board**.
- "Celebrating our Gifts" was the theme of a **Women's Day festival of art** at Fort Garry Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, March 20. More than 50 women participated in the festival, which included music, poetry reading, drama and displays of visual arts.
- Goshen College seeks **applicants for college physician**. Contact Norm Kauffmann, Dean of Students, Goshen College, Goshen, IN 46526; 219-535-7000.
- The U.N. Commission on Human Rights announced March 4 that it would appoint a **Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women**. This person will report annually to the commission, starting in 1995.





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Women in Ministry

- **Mary Jane Eby** of Lincoln City, Ore., was licensed for ministry in the Pacific Coast Conference in November, with a special focus on camp ministry. She was named president-elect of Mennonite Camp Association in March; she and her husband Larry are co-directors of Drift Creek Camp.
- **Heidi Regier Kreider** was ordained in February. She is pastor at Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Gainesville, Fla.
- **Elizabeth Caes** is pastor of West Philadelphia (Pa.) Mennonite Fellowship.
- **Carolyn Epp-Fransen** is co-interim pastor at Charleswood Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.
- **Karla Kaufman** is serving as half-time pastor at Fort Collins (Colo.) Mennonite Fellowship.
- **Gayle Berg** has begun as minister of youth and Christian education at Niagara (Ont.) United Church.
- **Joan Blatz** is pastor of Thompson (Man.) Mennonite Church.
- **Terry and Karen Martens Zimmerly** were ordained to pastoral Ministry at Grace Mennonite Church, Regina, Sask.
- **Laura Wiebe-Powell** is serving as co-pastor at Mennonite Church of the Servant, Wichita, Kan.
- **Louise Wideman** was installed as associate pastor of Whitestone Mennonite Church, Hesston, Kan., in March.
- **Shirlee Kohler Yoder** was ordained as minister of pastoral care of Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., in March.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committees on Women's Concerns. We believe that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committees strive to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures through which women and men can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committees on Women's Concerns.

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